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And all the people were giving thanks to *Etsu* Bello,
Because he gave his money to buy a motor-car,
That motor-car that will become a thing of benefit
To all the human beings.

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In myth and religion the 'binding forces' of the kingdom gather themselves to fullest strength. The *Etsu* Nupe is not, as we have seen, the religious as well as the political leader of his people; unlike the village chief, he cannot even claim kinship links with the priests of his country. But Nupe kingship is linked in so many ways with religious usages and forms of ritual symbolism that they inevitably become instruments of political solidarity. Rites and beliefs are focused upon the person of the king. Appeals for the help of supernatural agencies become appeals to agencies more or less clearly symbolic of the political system. The welfare and continuity of the community, unthinkable without these supernatural safeguards, become unthinkable without the state.

Out of the weak and irregular uniformity of beliefs and rituals and out of disconnected local cults and traditions the kingdom thus creates a new religious community. One of the centres of this religious unification is that 'mythical charter' which made the dynasty of Nupe kings descendants of the mythical culture-hero, Tsoede. Relics of Tsoede, regalia, instruments of ordeal, magical emblems, which exist in every town of the Emirate, are the symbols of this ancient sacred pact. The name and tradition of Tsoede is also associated with cults which secure childbirth, fertility, and well-being, with certain rituals which prevent floods of the Niger, drive away disease, or bring punishment upon a criminal.[1] To take one example only. In Mokwa exists a certain ritual called *Tsoede* or *sara* (Hausa, lit. malicious accusation, and also snake bite; refers here to the use of the ritual as ordeal), which is practised as ordeal, or whenever trouble befalls the community. It is performed by the *Sheshi*, that 'king-maker' of whom we have heard before; he places the short 'chain of Tsoede', the insignia of his office, on the ground in the sacred grove, makes a sacrifice of beer and fowl, and speaks thus:

God, we have come.
God, everybody has come.
This ancient thing of Tsoede
Which is lying on the ground,
It says we should bring beer.
Because of the old saying which we have heard,
Because of that we bring beer and fowl.
Tsoede, make the whole town prosper [or whatever is
the special aim of the invocation].

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A powerful secret society, organized to combat witchcraft, the order of the *ndakó gboyá*, became a *kuti 'tsu*, a King's Cult, only half a century ago. There is no doubt that the *ndakó gboyá* cult itself existed long before that. But under *Etsu* Masaba the head of this order, the grandfather of

[1] This latter cult I have described in *Man*, 1935, 143. The association of Tsoede with the main fertility cult of Nupe, the *gunnu*, is discussed in *J.R.A.I.*, 1937, p. 118.

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both on the same, profane, occasions.[1] More important, Nupe mythology is altogether flimsy and rudimentary. It illustrates only two tenets of the creed, the conception of a supreme deity and the role of 'medicine', while others, for example, the equally basic conception of 'ritual', are given no such expression. Nor does the mythology concern itself more than scantily with cosmological speculations or with the justification of particular ceremonies.

Certain legends meant to account for particular practices or ceremonials will be quoted later, in that context. Let me here illustrate my point by relating the one cosmological myth the Nupe possess. It is, strictly speaking, only 'near-cosmological', being concerned, not with the origin of the world and of all the things and creatures in it, but only with the origin of man, of the Nupe people, and of one observance (which is incorrectly stated). The myth, incidentally, may not be entirely a Nupe creation; the names of the first human beings mentioned in it have a Mohammedan flavour ;[2] and certain details of the narrative (the bull who appears out of the water, and his strange language) occur in almost the same form among the Bororó Fulani.[3] However this may be, the myth is far from well known, so that for this reason also it cannot be considered a relevant expression of the Nupe creed.

'In the beginning, there was a man called Ancestor Adă and a woman called Ancestress Adama. They had two children, one male, one female, who in turn begot two children, male and female. The male child died immediately after birth, while the girl stayed alive. When she grew up she spoke a strange language which her parents could not understand. But a bull who one day rose from the river when the girl was standing on the bank understood the language. He talked to the girl, and the two became friends. Later the bull became the girl's lover, and she bore him a male child. This child again spoke and understood the strange language. When the boy grew up, he used to go to the bank of the river to talk to the bull, until one day the bull climbed out of the river and followed the boy on dry land wherever he went. This boy was the ancestor of the "Cow Fulani", and the bull the first of the Fulani cattle.

'Ancestress Adama had a third child, a girl called Mureamu (Miriam or Mary), who had three children, two sons and a daughter. When they grew up the two young men both desired their sister. They quarrelled and one was killed. It was thus that

[1] The word in question is *etă*, meaning 'stories of old times', and these are told in daytime, not at night (as are stories meant for amusement), when people would be 'too tired to listen to serious things'.

[2] See below, p. 247.

[3] See F. W. de St. Croix, *The Fulani of Northern Nigeria*, p. 8.

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death and murder first appeared in the world. The couple who remained did not know what to do with the dead body. They carried the corpse on their shoulders for three days, lamenting and crying, but could not get rid of it. At last, God caused the earth to open, and they placed the body inside. Thus the practice of burial and of the three days' mourning for the dead began.[1] The couple now stayed together and begot a male child, who became the ancestor of the Nupe people.'

If, then, Nupe mythology is a very inadequate guide to dogma and doctrine, this inadequacy is itself significant, revealing the Nupe attitude towards their creed and indeed the whole tenor of their religious thought in their true perspective. Mythology, as we have said, illustrates and exemplifies rather than enunciates the creed. We may go further and say that it expresses the creed in a form less abstract and theoretical than does formulated doctrine. For myths borrow the phraseology of realistic accounts, dealing as they do with near-humans and near-natural events; thus they make less demand upon sheer credence, compromise with ordinary imagination, and as it were vulgarize the dogma. If, then, primitive religions rely on mythical narratives rather than on dogmatic assertions they seem to discard the more abstract contents of religious thought. Yet Nupe religion, which does not employ mythology either to any great extent, is clearly not of this kind. If the Nupe do not attempt a specific, coherent formulation of their creed, neither do they seek to re-phrase it in more concrete and would-be realistic language. In other words, Nupe religion forgoes the means of 'vulgarizing' the dogma. Thus, though its creed may be inarticulate, yet it is held in all abstractness.

3. CATEGORIES

(i) *God and the World*

The most basic concept of Nupe theology, that of the supreme being, is also the widest. In a sense it stands for the whole realm of religion, serving to separate all things that belong to that realm from others that do not. For in order to express this distinction the Nupe say of an object, phenomenon, or type of action that it is, or is not, *nyá Sokó*—'of God' or 'belonging to God'. There are two inaccuracies in this broad category of things religious. The clause 'of God' in the sense here understood is properly applied only in the context of discussions turning upon the dichotomy of the religious and profane. In a wider context the phrase loses its disjunctive implication; for ultimately everything is 'of God', that

[1] There is no such rule of 'three days' mourning'.

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founder of Nupe kingdom and serving the interests of the state. We shall later deal with these 'exceptions'. Let me here stress that in calling them that I am taking my lead from the people. Indeed, the Nupe would altogether disregard these lapses from a wholly abstract creed, which seems to require no effigies or visible symbols; for when comparing their religion with that of other peoples, the Nupe will always emphasize that they have no sacred emblems, idols, masks, or 'little likenesses' (*zazagĩži*).

It is perhaps not surprising that so abstract a conception as that of *kuti* should not be held with equal clarity by everyone. In particular, I met with two as it were heterodox notions; one was the idea that *kuti* represents a part of *Sokó*, or a *Sokó tetengi*, a 'Little God' (which, in Nupe language, is a contradiction in terms); according to the other, God was 'up above', but *kuti* was somehow of the earth, being a 'thing' buried in the ground, very likely in the places of ritual. These notions were always put tentatively, and were moreover voiced by individuals who could not claim the fullest knowledge available in the society, that is, by younger men or by Nupe under the influence of Islam; the older men, and especially the priests of *kuti*, declared such views to be false. But supernatural power understood more concretely and associated with specific material objects also has a place in the Nupe universe. This notion is embodied in the third tenet of the religion, which concerns the existence of *cigbe* or 'medicine'.

(iii) *Medicine*

Let me say, first of all, that 'medicine' is the literal translation of the vernacular term, which is applied not only to 'magic' substances but also to medicinal herbs or drugs of any kind, native as well as European, whose properties are assessed essentially empirically. Of the relation between the two we shall speak in a later context. Here we must note that the Nupe inventory of the 'things in the world' does not mention 'medicine', although in some respects it is an exact counterpart to *kuti*, that is, an agency meant to aid man in a universe governed by an all-too-distant deity. But unlike *kuti*, 'medicine' is not thought of as being part of the creation and a primordial gift of God. If it now exists in the world, it does so because of man's own endeavours. There is a legend, well known throughout the country, expounding this view.

'There was a certain younger brother, called Kpara, whose elder brother was Tswasha Malu. They lived in the time of *Etsu* (king) Shagó.[1] There existed a certain medicine, called *cekpyeca shina*

[1] The two brothers are mentioned in no other myth. The name of the king, Shagó, occurs also in the myth describing the origin of the

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shina buburukun (meaningless words). On the day when the two brothers were making this medicine, Kpara wished to climb up into the sky. Kpara explained to the king that he needed a chain. The king summoned the blacksmiths of the whole country and they forged a chain of seven links. Then Kpara tied the chain round his waist and went straight up, higher and higher, until he reached the sky. It took him three years to travel up to the sky, and people thought they would never see him again. At the end of the three years people beheld the chain dropping slowly down to earth, and 19 days later, Kpara himself dropped from the sky, sitting down, bang, on top of the chain. The people asked—Had he seen God? Kpara answered (this part is sung):

God is far away,
God is far away,
But medicines are applied on earth.

"The person who tries to eat porridge while shouting at the same time will get nothing into his stomach" (i.e. one must not attempt the impossible). Kpara then said to all the people that they must try and make medicine of ingredients. "For God is not watching man." This Kpara was the elder brother of the father who begot us—our tribe, that is.'

This legend or myth introduces two crucial features into Nupe doctrine. One is the assertion that 'God is not watching man', or literally, *Sokó nw' á yelé à*, 'God is not seeing'; the other is the notion that that powerful agency, *cigbe*, has been produced or discovered by man's own initiative. The two clearly hang together, both following logically from the root concept of the supreme being. The assertion that God 'is not watching' only expands and sharpens that other idea, that God, though creative and omnipotent, 'is far away'—too far away to follow closely his handiwork, and too impersonal to concern himself closely with all that happens on earth. And it is this extreme aloofness of the deity which justifies the further notion of human self-help. God, as we know, cannot be reached by prayers and invocations alone. Thus there have to be intermediaries, of which *kuti* is one and *cigbe* the other. But there is this difference. Only the *kuti* is 'of God'; equally, it provides only for the collective and unvarying needs of a people, not for the more variable and particular troubles of individuals. As regards these, God seems even more remote; for he has not thought of giving man the appropriate aids: rather, they had to be discovered by man left to himself. Here, then, we have

anti-witchcraft cult *ndakó gboyá* (see below, p. 173). Shagó is probably identical with the mythical hero and deity of Yoruba religion, Shangó, who, in Yoruba mythology, is described as a man or king of Nupe.

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of Mokwa, true to the fiction of the 'pact', held a formal court, trying the animal for breaking the pact and passing sentence of death.[1] The power of Mokwa over crocodiles is well known all over Nupe country and, today at least, unrivalled. The village of Katcha, on a tributary of the Niger, apparently had a 'sacred crocodile' in the past; but the charm had failed to work and, less faithful to their cult (or less optimistic) than the people of Mokwa, the people of Katcha abandoned the practice.

My second instance comes from Pichi, a small village near Bida, and concerns a spirit said to be embodied in the leopards of that locality. Surprisingly, it is identified with one of the early chiefs of Pichi, many generations back, and known by his name, *Ndakó Yisa*, Grandfather Yisa; but since all Nupe invariably refer to leopards in this circuitous and respectful manner, and since Yisa is an extremely common name, I am inclined to regard this quasi-totemic interpretation as apocryphal. Nor is the belief very positively stated or accompanied by special rituals. The people believe, however, that no leopard will attack a person of Pichi, and in turn refrain from molesting the animal, even if it kills their dogs or goats.

If animals ever played a more momentous role in the Nupe universe, there is little evidence of it today. Some disconnected 'superstitions' and a few suggestions in folklore are the only instances of this kind. Thus the Nupe believe that animals, like men, have 'spirit doubles' (of which more presently) and that certain animals are also possessed of quasi-human or superhuman faculties. The attitude towards leopards is a case in point. Most villagers are convinced that if the respectful, indirect reference to 'Grandfather Yisa' were omitted, the leopards in the neighbourhood would be annoyed by this 'lack of courtesy' and would surely attack the village (though strict observance of the rule would not make them more amenable or friendly); but no attempt is made to explain the belief or to relate it to some other, more fundamental, tenet of the creed. Much the same applies to 'Father Tortoise', *Ndakpa*, who is the hero of numerous tales, in which he plays the part of a would-be clever fellow who runs into various adventures, either amusing or containing a moral. A small red beetle which appears at the beginning of the rains is called *Sokó*, which odd nomenclature elicits only this comment: 'Since the

[1] The people told me afterwards that the crocodile had in fact died; when I pointed out that I had since seen it in the stream, I was assured that it was 'a different one'. The people of Jebba Island, incidentally, claimed that the river ritual *ketsá* similarly protected all riverain people from crocodiles; which claim was ridiculed by the proud owners of the crocodile cult in Mokwa, who at once recalled that three years previously a Kede man from the river had been killed by a crocodile.

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insect heralds the season, it must surely be sent by God.' We may mention finally that the decorations of houses and the ornaments on leather or carved wood frequently display the outline figures of the 'mythical' animals leopard, tortoise, or crocodile; again, no deeper significance attaches to them; also, today at least, the figures of 'ordinary' animals as well as other designs are as often employed, being all meant 'for amusement only'.

The most interesting variety of spirits is also the one least clearly conceived. This is the personal spirit or spirit double, which belongs to every person from birth until death and cannot be shed or changed. Men have male, women female, spirit doubles, and both can be either good or evil; there is no accounting for the latter fact, which rests entirely 'with God'. The spirits are also of unequal strength and often jealous of one another, forcing their own feelings of hostility upon their human counterparts. The success of a marriage, for example, will be determined by the manner in which the spirit doubles happen to agree. But the spirits are responsible only for the luck and fate of their human twins, not for their character or morals. A friendly spirit will protect its human twin; it will, for example, betray to him in sleep or dream the name of witches who try to harm him. More generally, the 'good' spirit can give wealth, prosperity, and success in everything, at least as much as its strength permits; a weak spirit might well fail in all these attempts; while 'bad' spirits would intentionally make their twins suffer nightmares, illness, and misfortune of all kinds.

Not every illness is of spirit origin; the illness which readily responds to treatment or has a well-understood physical origin (breaking one's leg, food poisoning, and the like), has nothing to do with spirits. Only stubborn or frequent ailments of obscure origin, and especially mental diseases, are ascribed to the spirit doubles. But again, this does not apply to every form of mental disorder. Thus the Nupe define idiocy in what are to them rational terms, as a mere 'deficiency' (*eti a gbà o*—'the head is insufficient'), and point out that it often goes together with bodily deformities. Like the latter, mental deficiency 'simply happens', for example, owing to some carelessness of the expectant mother. 'Raving lunacy', however, is invariably caused by spirits; and, let us note this, since the spirit doubles are part of divine creation, lunacy, being their gift, is ultimately a gift of God. Yet madmen are in no way vessels of divinity; rather are they instances of the misfortunes and evils which God inscrutably dispenses.

The belief in spirit doubles leads to curious consequences. If the power and morals of the spirit determine the success in life of its human double without determining also the character or morals of

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aids are made to overlap in their aims or concerns. Thus one sacrifices to spirits, twins, kinship souls, and, through rituals, to God himself; or one uses *cigbo*; and one does so for the same reasons —to secure prosperity, to protect oneself from illness, or to safeguard fertility of man or nature. Even so, there is some design and order in this confusing picture; the Nupe universe is not entirely a random array of entities and mystic forces, but something of a cosmos. We shall, by way of a summary, try and outline its features.

4. RELIGION AND POLITY

First, however, I must mention an important figure in the Nupe creed which falls into none of the categories so far discussed—Tsoede or Edegi, the legendary first King of Nupe. The tradition of Tsoede and its essentially political symbolism has been discussed elsewhere, so that here a few remarks will suffice.[1]

Tsoede's memory survives in an elaborate cycle of myths, the only instance of this kind in Nupe; several rituals and sacred objects (an iron chain, brass bangles worn by chiefs, the bronze figures mentioned before) are said to have been his creation; and a specific cult also bears his name. Similar observances also exist, here and there, in the villages, relating to the ancestors of hereditary chiefs; they, too, are sometimes regarded as the founders of their communities or as the initiators of particular cults, their *kuci* being invoked in regular ceremonials. But Tsoede is much more than an ancestor chief magnified, and the rituals called after him do more than merely summon up his memory. Nor is it the *kuci* of Tsoede which is invoked. The concrete ties of descent, implicit in the worship of *kuci*, are obviously absent between the ancestor king and the vast, nation-wide congregation of his cult, while his 'personal soul' has no part in any cycle of rebirth.[2] In the rituals of Tsoede it is he himself who is invoked, so that he may intervene with *Sokó* on behalf of his people. The precise circumstances of this intervention are neither explained nor pictured in any way; yet one knows that it is more powerful as well as active than that accessible to *kuci* (which are merely 'watched by God').

If Tsoede is not a *kuci*, neither is he a 'spirit' nor *aljénu*. He represents, in fact, a figure outside the general framework of Nupe religion and a conception both anomalous and unique in Nupe

[1] See *A Black Byzantium*, pp. 72–76, 141–2.

[2] Tsoede is said to have been harelipped, and every Nupe child born with a harelip is still named after him. But this custom only serves to keep his memory alive; for it has no further consequences and does not imply any belief in Tsoede's reincarnation.

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779 thought. He is a man-become-deity (though there is no pantheon where he could find a niche), a national hero turned into an 773 ancestral being (though again, there are no named ancestors to whose ranks he might be added). Tsoede is the ancestor only of a line of kings; but in a wider and vaguer sense all Nupe within the kingdom regard themselves with pride as his 'offspring', in the sense, that is, that they were born in a country he founded and made great and come of stock which, originally, lived under his rule and supernatural protection. This protection, which still endures, bears on certain problems of life which are resolved also by means of other rituals or appeals to *Sokó*, namely, the ubiquitous problems of illness and fertility. But these are only incidental effects of Tsoede's mystic power; its main efficacy used to bear on political interests—the maintenance of the 'king's law', the punishment of criminals, and the protection of the 'King's Highway' on the river Niger.[1] Even the 'incidental effects' of the Tsoede cult are bound up with political interests, being embodied in material objects which are at the same time the paraphernalia of secular power. Let me only mention the 'Chain of Tsoede', which is believed to cure the sterility of women but which was formerly also used to strangle political offenders and to uncover crimes in the manner of an ordeal.

[182] In brief, the Tsoede cult is essentially a State religion superimposed upon a pre-existing creed. The cult ties the people to supernatural benefits granted not simply by God, nor by a God who commands his own rituals, but by a God who listens to kings. And its rituals, no longer 'owned' by communities or kin groups, are aligned with the growth and pride of a nation.

5. THE NUPE COSMOS

779 I spoke before of the supererogatory character of certain Nupe beliefs. In a sense, the greater part of Nupe doctrine has this 772 character. Consider that the Nupe hypothesize a deity who creates the world and then leaves it to itself—uncertain, full of obscurity and accident, and embracing good and evil in entirely fortuitous measure. With such a conception of the relationship between God and the world, the Nupe need not have speculated further about some deeper meaning behind the features of the universe. Anything that exists or happens in it would be sufficiently explained by that key concept of an aloof and non-ethical deity. One might, for example, imagine a religion starting from the same premisses which would leave all further explanations to the crude realism of naïve common sense. Whether so unambitious a theo-

[1] See my article on the 'King's Hangmen' in *Man*, 1935, 143.

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entrance hut. The priest informs the chief that the ritual has been completed and the chief replies—'It is well; (after) what has been done, may God give that we pass through (endure) this year, and that the next years may pass (in well being).' From the chief's house the congregation repairs to the home of the priest, where they stay to drink the rest of the beer. Meanwhile women and young men, who were not allowed to see the earlier part of the ceremony, have gathered outside the house and drums have been brought out. A dance begins in which the old men alone are supposed to perform; actually, the younger men (not the women) join in later, but they are only suffered to take part and are sometimes stopped, though not very seriously. Later the whole crowd walks in procession through the village, 'saluting' on the way the houses of the various family heads and finally stopping at the dancing ground. Here the dance is resumed, in an unexcited fashion, until nightfall, when both the dance and the ceremonial come to an end.

We noticed, in the *ɨiba* prayer, the emphasis on 'this year and next' and on 'new things', that is, on the completion of a phase, and on continuity and renewal. This idea is even more concretely expressed; for immediately after the ceremony the skin of the goat that had been sacrificed is sewn into a sack, shaped like bellows, to be kept in the priest's house until next year's ritual. There it will serve as an instrument of ordeal, anyone accused of a crime being able to protest his innocence by touching the bag: if he lied, his body would swell up ('like the bellows'). Thus the protection of the law and the punishment of crime are renewed year by year by the force of this *kuti* concerned with the 'doing of new things'.

The *gunnu*, unlike most other Nupe rituals, has its special myth, which relates how the ceremonial originated and also explains, if only in an elliptic and cursory fashion, one or two features of the actual practice.[1] It tells of a mysterious stranger who, many generations ago, came to live among the Beni, in a small hill village in the north, close to the border of Gwari country. After a while he developed leprosy, was looked after by the kind-hearted villagers, and eventually died. As was the custom, the body of the leper was abandoned in the uninhabited bush on the top of the hill. Later, it was found that the body had miraculously disappeared and that in its place there had appeared a patch of pure white sand. The villagers then realized that the stranger had been no ordinary mortal and that God himself had buried him. They planted a tree on the place and instituted a big ceremony to be performed annually, so that the *kuci* of the dead should be propitiated and duly worshipped. The ritual, which is said to have

[1] A much more detailed description of the ritual and the full texts of the *gunnu* songs are given in *J.R.A.I.*, 1937, vol. LXVII.

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spread in the course of years through Beni country and the whole of Nupe, is the *gunnu*; the hill is known as *Gunnu* Hill; and the white sand is said to possess special healing properties (a claim which chemical analysis did not confirm). The *gunnu* priest of that village is regarded as the senior among all other *gunnu* priests, almost as the spiritual head of their fraternity; for at the beginning of the month of the *gunnu* celebrations every born *Ndazo* of Beni country makes a pilgrimage to *Gunnu* Hill, travelling by night and in secrecy, to salute and consult the local priest, and to collect a little of the sand and a few pebbles from the sacred place. The sand will later be used as medicine and for divining (in *hati* fashion); the pebbles will be placed on the place of sacrifice, and when the *Ndazo* opens the *gunnu* dance he will put one of the pebbles in his mouth.

These are all the tangible links between the myth and the ritual practice. We note that they apply only to the Beni subtribe, a section more closely united by kinship ties as well as politically,[1] so that the collaboration of the *gunnu* priests goes together with co-operation in other, secular spheres. In the rest of the country the religious collaboration and the myth sustaining it are alike unknown; at least, the myth might be known only sketchily, and would be quoted merely as a curious tale of no real consequence.

Apart from these few references to details of procedure, the myth offers only a vague and incongruous pedigree for the ritual itself; it merely relates certain mysterious happenings in the distant past, which seem to have no bearing on the aim or the general design of the ritual, and then concludes summarily—'And this was the beginning of the *gunnu*'. This kind of jumpy logic is of course not unfamiliar in the mythology of primitive peoples; its incongruity in the present case can be seen from these three instances. To begin with, so unique a feature as the *Ndazo* priesthood is completely omitted in the mythical account. Conversely, the arrival and death of the stranger and the whole notion of this saint-like personage, buried by God Himself, are in no way touched upon in the ceremony; indeed, they represent utterly alien features in the conceptual framework of Nupe religion. Characteristically, when the Nupe tell the story they have no other term to describe the character of the stranger than the Arabic word *wali* ('saint'). Finally, the crucial motif in the myth, leprosy, is without bearing upon the aim and design of the ritual. There are certain indirect and tenuous links: everywhere in Nupe (not

[1] I am referring to the old federation of the twelve Beni 'towns', which in some respects survived to the present day. See above, p. 70, and *A Black Byzantium*, p. 25.

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substantiate the other 'theory'. Indeed, I suspect that it is mere 'theory'—an attempt to lend neatness and logic to an unconvincing and haphazard division.

It should perhaps be added that there is no trace in Jebba of an original ethnic division of the kind which, in other Nupe communities, accounts for the divided 'ownership' of particular rituals. Nor does the situation elsewhere in Nupe furnish any clue. The association of rituals with the funeral ceremonial for elders occurs, so far as I can judge, only in the river valley. But the puzzling dual division does not occur outside Jebba. In Bele, a small village up-river belonging to the same sub-tribe, Gbedegi, the two main local rituals, *gunnu* and *žiba*, are performed together at the death of all elders. In Mokwa, another Gbedegi town, a short distance from the river, the majority of rankholders are given a *gunnu* funeral; at the death of the *Sheshi* (the hereditary 'king-maker') his 'own' ritual is performed, and at the death of the *Samaza* (a non-hereditary rank), the masked ceremonial *elo*, which is in the charge of that elder. In neither case are the two men or their families excluded from the *gunnu*. Thus, as regards the Jebba version of that custom, I can only conclude that it represents an isolated attempt, neither thorough nor ultimately successful, to divide two of the main rituals evenly among the community. And this seems consistent with the general predilection of the Nupe for dichotomous arrangements.

(ii) *Movable Rituals*

A novel characteristic of these rites in Jebba is that they can be performed also at the request of individuals, even of strangers and non-Nupe, who wish to invoke the powerful 'magic' of the island or have been advised by diviners to do so. Indeed, the movable rituals are meant to benefit a much larger population, that is, all the groups living on the river. The *ketsá* sacrifice, more particularly, has made Jebba Island almost a place of pilgrimage.

The man in charge of the *ketsá* is called *Ndádoro*, 'Father of *doro*' (which is another name for the ritual). A priest in the strict sense of the word, like the *Ndazo*, he also walks about bareheaded and always wears 'ritual' dress. The *Ndádoro* I knew was old and blind, so that his actual duties fell to his son and future successor, though the father would still lend his presence and authority to the ritual performance.

There is a story connected with the origin of the ritual. Once a disastrous flood of the Niger destroyed all houses and farms and brought famine to the river valley. The *Kuta* at Muregi, the chief of the 'Downstream Kede', had learned from Tsoede how to combat floods and prevent their recurrence. Following this advice, the

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Kuta sent a white cow to Jebba, instructing the island people to add a white cock and some honey, and to sacrifice all these at the foot of *Ketsá* Rock. This was the beginning of the ritual, which is today repeated, still by the *Kuta's* order, whenever there is a danger of floods, and also when a new Kede chief assumes office. The story thus closely supports the actual practice so far as it bears on the welfare of the riverain people and on the strong political link between Jebba Island and the Kede sub-tribe.[1] But the story tells nothing of the origin of the *ketsá* priestship; nor does it refer to the much wider application of the ritual. For anyone on the river can request its performance—chiefs for their communities, individuals for themselves or their families—and can do so for widely different reasons; equally, the sacrifices will vary widely, according to the advice given by diviners. But while the ritual performed in the name of the Kede chief and for the whole river population is on a large scale, involving the usual sacrificial meal of all the elders as well as drumming, singing, and dancing, the 'private' rituals, strictly 'businesslike', consist only in the sacrifice itself, performed by the priest and his close kinsmen. In 1936, for example, the following 'private' performances took place: the *Etsu* of Patigi sent a fowl, requesting it to be sacrificed for the general well-being of his community; the chief of a small riverain village did the same; a Hausa man offered a goat for good fishing; a Kakanda man a goat for 'health'; two Nupe men offered fowls to secure the birth of children; and there were other, similar, requests. A final instance concerned me personally. I had gone down with a severe attack of dysentry, and my Jebba friends, who visited me regularly, advised me to sacrifice a fowl in order to recover. The sacrifice was duly performed, though unhappily I was too weak at the time to attend it: and this was the closest I ever got to seeing the *ketsá*, which was performed so irregularly as well as promptly that the news of its performance never reached me in time.

The second movable rite is concerned with the 'Chain of Tsoede' and is called by that name, *tídzana*. In appearance, this is an old slave chain, with fetters for arms and legs; it is kept in the *Ejukó's* house and is invariably covered with dried-up blood and beer from the sacrifice. In 1936 three of these sacrifices were performed, all small-scale and 'businesslike', and invoked by local people.[2] One sacrifice was for a man who offered a goat to recover from a fever;

[1] For fuller information on the Kede sub-tribe see my chapter on 'The Kede: A Riverain State in Northern Nigeria', in *African Political Systems*, 1940, ed. M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard.

[2] Strangers, too, may invoke the *tídzana*, though this is said to happen relatively rarely.

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shall in fact make such an assumption, more precisely, I shall assume that the fear of female witches is causally related to certain threats and tensions pervading the social life of the people, being a 'symptom' of these disturbances. Like any psychopathological symptom, too, the witchcraft beliefs contain an indication of the causes from which they spring. As we shall see, the symptoms are easy to read; for the Nupe witchcraft beliefs express the social threats and tensions from which they spring with little disguise. These become visible, in particular, in three sets of facts: first, in the explicit reference, mentioned before, to the market organization of the women; secondly, in the concrete accusations levied against alleged witches; and thirdly, in the existing legends about witchcraft. The first kind of evidence belongs to the formulated statements on witchcraft, and hence to the 'doctrine' proper; the other two, however, to some extent conflict with the doctrine, emphasizing traits of witchcraft which are disregarded or passed over in direct statements and discussions. This fact seems itself important; for it suggests that the traits in question betray fears or desires too vital and too disturbing to be openly admitted. Which assumption, too, will be borne out in the further discussion.

3. SEX ANTAGONISM

Let me first quote the witchcraft legends, though this means anticipating a little; for they are concerned less with witchcraft as such than with the origin of the anti-witchcraft cult *ndakó gboyá*, which will occupy us later. In fact, the legends do not even mention the words 'witch' or 'witchcraft'; but the implication is clear since they describe how the evil doings of certain women could only be suppressed by a 'secret' which everybody knows is employed against witches only. There are two such legends, one esoteric, being known only to the adepts of the *ndakó gboyá* cult, the other widely known and quoted.

The first legend tells about a 'certain king of Nupe' whose mother was an interfering woman, constantly meddling in his affairs. Whatever the king did his mother would frustrate, so that 'she caused the *Etsu* to be powerless'. At last he consulted a diviner and asked for his help. The diviner instructed the king to procure ten lengths of cloth. The diviner then sewed the pieces together, in the form of a tall, hollow tube, and used a 'secret' on it. The cloth rose up, flew through the air, and dropped upon the king's mother, covering her. It carried her up into the sky, and she was never seen again. From this day on the 'secret' remained a *kuti* of the kings. Whenever a woman is guilty of witchcraft, the king will employ the *kuti*, which is the *ndakó gboyá*.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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The second legend, apart from being more widely known, is also more precise in its 'historical' allusions, naming the Nupe king in whose reign the critical events are said to have occurred; he is the same *Etsu* Shago whose reign saw the discovery of *cigbe*.[1] At the time, the people lived a lawless life, behaving insolently and 'refusing to listen to the Great Men'. Men would steal each other's wives and commit adultery without shame. The older women, especially, caused much trouble; they quarrelled among themselves and 'gave no peace'. The more law-abiding among the men grew angry and spoke harshly to the women; but these 'replied with insolence'. To continue *verbatim*: Now there was a young man, who had great strength. He set out and went into the bush. He then covered his head with cloth, like this (here the informant veiled his head with his gown, holding its end above his head, imitating the cloth mask of the *ndakó gboyá*). He reached the place where the women were causing a disturbance and yelled thus—'*Yi-i-i-i*' (the cry of the *ndakó gboyá*). When the women heard him they fled in fear. But one old woman did not run away. The old men also came, they waited for the woman to give way until they were tired: but she did not run away. The younger ones had all fled and left her alone. Thereupon the old men said to her—'*ezo, ezo*' (the ritual salute of the *ndakó gboyá*).[2] Thus they caught the woman. At last they killed her with an iron rod (*sãyi*). The men said: 'Even though she saw the *kuti* she did not run away; thus she was killed.'

We note two things: in the legend the evilness of the women implies striking at men or at least at their authority; also, the truly evil woman is pictured as old and as older than her victim or the man helpless against her (the king in the first legend and the young man in the second). On both points the legends side with the practice rather than with the theory of witchcraft, that is, with the concrete accusations, not with the formulated belief. According to the latter, the witch attacks human life at large, not only men, and she can be young or old, married or unmarried. The concrete case histories, however, show that the majority of victims are males, and usually younger men who have fallen under the influence of an older woman, who is then readily identified as the witch; while the alleged witch is always married, and often middle-aged or old. There is a further cleavage between 'theory' and 'practice'. As will be remembered, our text suggested that witches attack their own kin only exceptionally. This notion is

[1] See above, p. 17.

[2] This is not strictly correct. '*Ezo*' is the salute of the *gunnu* priest, but it is here used as though it belonged to the *ndakó gboyá* cult. These and other references to the cult will become clear later (see below, pp. 190 *et seq.*).

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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further elaborated in popular belief; for it is generally held that a witch who would attack her own flesh and blood cannot do so alone but must enlist the help of other witches, not related to the victim. Kinship, then, in some measure deflects and frustrates the evil designs of witches. It is in fact true that witches are only rarely accused of harming their own blood relations; I recorded only two cases of this kind, both referring to the witch's own children. But the victims are not necessarily strangers; as often they are affinal relations of the woman witch (her son-in-law, her husband, his brother or the brother's children, or the husband's children by another wife).

From this varied evidence the following picture of the witch emerges: she is the enemy of men and of male authority; she seeks to dominate men; her evilness is somehow bound up with married state and occasionally with old age, that is, age beyond child-bearing; and her evilness is often directed against a husband and his kin. Now all these traits fall into place against the background of that other belief which links witchcraft with the economic position of the women; for seen against this background, and allowing for the fantasy disguise, the witch is accused of doing mystically precisely what the women, in virtue of their economic power, are accused of doing in real life. So that the witchcraft beliefs and fears paraphrase a true state of affairs and the anxieties and frustrations arising from it. Consider, then, for a moment that 'true state of affairs'.

To begin with, a great many Nupe men, peasants as well as craftsmen or members of the 'free professions' in the town, are heavily in debt to their trader-wives, on whom they often have to rely for money for tools, for some unforeseen heavy expenditure, and even for such items as the brideprice of a son or funeral expenses, which it is the man's duty to defray. If this dependence on the wife must detract from the man's proper status as the 'breadwinner', his authority is seriously diminished also by another factor. In the Nupe kinship organization most rights and obligations descend in the paternal line; and as sons (to a lesser extent, daughters) derive their kin group membership (membership of a particular 'house') from their fathers, have a place in their father's home and labour team, and inherit his property, land or profession, so they normally look to him or his male kin for economic support. But where the mother is the richer, the inheritance she will leave will be at least as important, and even while she is still alive her sons or daughters will turn to her for financial help. Frequently, in fact, the mother will pay directly, and not only through loans made to her husband, for a son's marriage, buy him clothes or luxuries, or shoulder the cost of a more expensive

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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ledge' a miscellany of incongruous items. Often the 'books' they get hold of are merely odd assortments of bits of literature, the same volume perhaps containing an extract on marriage law, a page or two on astrology, a treatise on the human body, and a fragment of some Hausa chronicle. Nor does the specific knowledge of Moslem theology fare any better. Again it is a medley of incongruous bits of information and in no way approaches the orthodox teaching of Islam.

The further down you pass in the scale of Nupe Mohammedan scholarship, the more confused and fragmentary becomes this knowledge. Take this summary account of creation and the powers of God which was given to me by one of the 'simple' mallams: 'Mohammed was the first man on earth; the devil (*Sheitan*) sends illness and misfortunes; after death, the good people become kindly spirits (*aljénu*), while evil persons are turned into dust'. Which last statement was the only reference to the ethical sanctions of Islam I encountered in Nupe; for hell or heaven or the last judgment are never mentioned. The notion, incidentally, that Mohammed was the first man is widespread; but otherwise the ideas about creation and the universe are far from uniform. Here is a different and fuller account, recorded from another mallam of this class: Formerly, when all the people lived together in the same place, there existed 'little gods' (*sokó tetengi*), whom God (*Allah*) sent down to earth to take away the souls (*rayi*) of the persons whose life was nearing its end. But the people grew frightened at this mysterious and unannounced demise and tried to evade it by scattering over the earth. So God introduced a new kind of death, heralded by illness, or overcoming man suddenly, through lightning or other natural disasters. These 'little gods' are the *malaika* (the Arabic *mal'ak*, 'angels'). In addition to the messengers of death there exist also *malaika* who bring rain, cause the crops to grow, and watch over man; the chief one amongst them is Jibelelu (Gabriel); others are Mikailu, Ismailu, Ibrahimu, though my informant did not pretend to know them all.

The knowledge possessed by the 'true' mallam is hardly less unorthodox, even though it is fuller and more ambitious. The following text was dictated to me by a gifted pupil of the most famous mallam of Bida and fully conformed to the master's teaching.

'In the beginning there were Adama and Mother Adā. They had three daughters, Mureamu [Miriam, Mary], Fatima [daughter of Mohammed], and Barkisa [Bilkis, the Queen of Sheba], and numerous sons. These were all prophets. God then divided the world into pagans and Moslems. The greatest king of the pagans

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794 was Firauna [Firaun, Arabic for Pharaoh], who conquered the whole earth and had immense wealth. He had seven houses, in
●773 each of which a fire was eternally burning; criminals were thrown into these houses, to be burned to death. He also had seven houses filled with wonderful things and a hundred beautiful women in each. Good people were rewarded by being admitted to these houses and being made free of the things they contained. Once there happened to be a great drought and famine; but Firauna prayed to God, and rain fell. Thereupon Firauna said to the people: "Have I not sent rain? I am your God." Thus he claimed that he himself was God, and all who denied him, the Mohammedans among them, were fettered and left lying in the sun until they perished. Firauna decided to make war on God in the sky. He called all his men together and made them build a huge tower. This lasted sixty years. When the tower reached up to the sky, Firauna ordered his soldiers to shoot at the sky with bows and arrows, for two years. But God destroyed the tower and innumerable people perished. Then God called his prophet Musa [Moses] and ordered him to rise against Firauna. Thus Musa called together an army; but it was much weaker than Firauna's, so that the true believers, led by Musa, were turned to flight. Pursued by Firauna they reached a river as wide as the Niger; God caused the water to dry up so that they could cross, but when Firauna's army followed, it was swallowed up by the river. Now Musa ruled over the world and established the reign of God. When he died, he was succeeded by the other prophets, Abraham, Yisa, Haruna, Idirisu, and finally Mohammed.'

794 There is no need to point out the motley nature of this account. Yet the people uncritically accept these crude narratives as evidence of 'learning' as they similarly accept the lists of 'angels' and the string of names with which diviners bolster up their 'astrology'.[1] Since the traditional Nupe beliefs possess little or nothing of this kind, it might be thought that Mohammedan lore fills some pre-existing lacunae. But this is not really so. The average Nupe Moslem is no more interested in the pseudo-Mohammedan cosmology or hagiology than is the pagan Nupe in myths of this kind.[2] But the former remains 'book-knowledge', which goes with the new religion and is expected of its teachers; so that a great many topics

[1] See above, p. 59n.

[2] The experiences of Christian evangelists offer interesting corroboration. The theological cosmology of Christian teaching evokes no interest among the Nupe. An evangelist told me about his abortive attempts in this direction, when his converts-to-be frankly admitted that they 'knew nothing' about the creation of the world but could not be convinced of the value of knowing more.

8: Walker G-5 (ca. 1933) 1934 FF52 Nupe FF52

8. Then, there are two figures which in appearance seem to be cast out of pure copper. One is 1 foot 10 inches high, and represents a man standing with clasped hands. A small pigtail adorns the head, the eyes are very bulging, and the feet very big. The other (Plate M 6) is a remarkably realistic bit of modelling, and is as noticeable for this quality as No. 4 is for its formal decorative treatment.

9. There remains one small figure (Plate M 7, 8), 1 foot 4 inches high, apparently of pure brass. It is of a male figure of ungainly proportions and coarse features, holding a crook and wearing an apron. In addition, a small cotton cloth is tied round its loins.

10. No. 4 is very heavy, due probably to the fact that the clay core is still within the figure. The others are light and hollow. All are or have at one time been on shallow rectangular bases.

11. The first thing that strikes one about the figures as a whole is the difference in the material of which they are cast. All of them appear to be made by the *cire perdue* process. But, as has been indicated above, four are of dark bronze, two appear to be of pure copper, and one of brass. Only the three last-named are kept scoured. Another striking feature is the divergence of technique. It is impossible to think that there are less than three sources for these figures, not because of the difference in metal used but on account of the wide difference in treatment—unless, of course, they are copies of originals. However this may be, the designs on Plate M 2, 3, 4 are so distinctive and conventionalized that they must have had antecedents, and it is to be hoped that this article may have given sufficient data by which their origin can be traced.

12. The Village Head of Tada tells the following legend. The Chief of Atagara had a son called Shode who was a successful hunter but could not find a market for his meat. At that time the chief of a certain town called Wanta had a girl in his household whom he gave to Shode to cook the meat of the animals he killed. After a time she became with child by Shode. When he was about to return to his home, he brought her a charm and a loin cloth and told her to give them to her son when he was born, for a son it would be. Shortly after he had returned home, his father, the chief of Atagara, died and he succeeded to the chiefdom. Now, in those times when a new chief was installed, each town brought slaves, and it happened that this child Edegi, which the girl bore to Shode, was amongst them on this occasion. When the chief, Shode, saw Edegi, he recognized him by the charm and loin cloth, promoted him to honour and showed him much affection. Shortly before his death he called Edegi and told him that after his death he should gather all his property together and leave the country. At this the townspeople rose up in jealousy, but Edegi escaped and travelled up the Niger with his loaded canoes till he came to the neighbourhood of Bida. There he abandoned chains because of their weight and passed on to Tafa in Bida territory, then to Tada, Gbere and Jebba, at each of which places he left either chains or ornamental figures. He got as far as Kwatashi in Bussa, and then returned or was driven back. His boat and poles were of bronze. They lie in the Ega river close to Muregi. Edegi sank himself and the boat because he could not elude his enemies. He was the first chief of the Nupé.[1]

13. The information given in this account suggested further inquiry at Gbere, 15 miles east of Jebba, opposite Rába, the only one of the above-mentioned places that is situated in Ilorin Province. Owing to the phenomenal floods it was not possible to reach the village itself, but the chains were brought to Tada for inspection. There are five of them, measuring 33 feet 6 inches, 20 feet, 23 feet, 8 feet 8 inches and 7 feet 2 inches respectively, and all are much corroded. The links vary from 3 inches to 6 inches in length and are rectangular in shape. At the end of one chain is a circular link. The weight of all the chains is about 20 lbs.

14. The Ndeji and the Wangwa of Gbere say that the chains were used in pre-British days for strangling criminals. Executions were carried out in the bush by the Cheche assisted by three youths. The present Cheche who looks after the chains has not seen an execution, but the Ndeji

[1] *Note.*—According to the Bussa legend, Edegi was chief of Gbere. He came up the river as far as Kwatashi, and encamped on the east bank of the Niger. Sarkin Wawa sent to warn him that he was not destined to become ruler of this region and if he stayed death would be his portion. It was then low water, and Edegi walked out to a large rock to receive the Wawa envoys.

When he heard their message he laid a curse upon the rock that any canoe that came near it would sink and any man that touched it would die. Edegi then departed down stream, but the rock remains and is still called Dutsin Edegi.